DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 200 107 HE 013 575

AUTHOR Scott, Robert A.
TITLE Three Futures in Collegiate Theatre (in Indiana).
PUB DATE Apr 80
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Indiana Theatre Association (Indianapolis, IN, April 18, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Programs; *Cultural Activities; *Dramatics; Elementary Education; General Education; Higher Education; *Liberal Arts; Population Trends; Social Change; *Theater Arts; Undergraduate Study
IDENTIFIERS *Indiana

ABSTRACT

The nature of collegiate theatre programs and possible future activities in theatre programs are examined, along with information about the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, higher education and demography in Indiana, and higher education and social change nationally. It is suggested that the changes in demographics that affect college campuses and programs are parallel to changes either taking place or expected in society at large. Among these changes are that the median age is higher, and the population of small cities and the suburbs is increasing. An increase in the type of people who, in terms of age, income, and residence, tend to attend theatre, concerts, and museums is projected. Drama is important in that it: can raise questions about important themes, such as life and death; provides a forum for moral, cultural, and political ideas; provides both entertainment and public service; and is important to the liberal arts. It provides instruction and experience that influence oral, cognitive, and manual skill development, the use of language, and sensitivity to the past, and to ethical and aesthetic values. Theatre programs provide training in such skills as acting, directing, and playwriting. Conflicts between a liberal arts orientation and the conservatory approach, and conflicts in relation to attempts to develop accreditation standards for theatre programs are noted. The future roles of collegiate theatre in educating and serving its publics, in undergraduate general education, and in elementary education are suggested. (SW)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED200107

Three Futures in Collegiate Theatre (in Indiana)

Dr. Robert A. Scott
Director of Academic Affairs
Indiana Commission for Higher Education

Paper presented at the 1980 annual meeting of
the Indiana Theatre Association, Indianapolis, April 18.

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Robert A. Scott

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

HE 013 775

Introduction

I have three thoughts to offer my colleagues in theatre. First, I want to tell you about the Commission for Higher Education, higher education and demography in Indiana, and higher education and social change nationally.

Second, I want to state my assessment of the nature of collegiate theatre programs.

Third, I want to share some ideas about possible future activities in theatre programs. My suggestions for program development are neither prophesies nor prescriptions; they are ideas which attempt to build bridges between social facts and collegiate theatre.

Indiana

The Commission for Higher Education, a statutory body whose twelve members are appointed by the Governor for overlapping terms of four years each, was established by the General Assembly in 1971. The Commission employs a staff of seventeen to help carry out its responsibilities for developing a coordinated plan for meeting the post-high school educational needs of Indiana citizens. It reviews operating and capital budget requests, and program proposals from public colleges and universities, and reports on them to the Governor and the General Assembly. The Commission conducts studies as needed on various aspects of post-high school education, including vocational education and technical training, nursing education, and special education, to name but a few examples. The Commission, which meets in

public session ten times a year, receives and administers all federal funds for postsecondary education in the state.

There are six corporate public institutions in Indiana, and they have a total of 19 campuses and 13 vocational-technical centers. These institutional entities enroll approximately 175,000 students. The 31 members of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Indiana, Inc., enroll approximately 53,000 students, and the six independent religious institutions enroll 3,000 students. In addition, there are 100 post-high-school-level proprietary institutions which enroll 16,000 students. The total of post-high school students enrolled is nearly 250,000; about 70 percent are enrolled in the public sector. Collegiate institutions in the state have annual expenditures of nearly one billion dollars, of which almost 40 percent is provided by the state. These public funds represent almost one quarter of annual general fund tax dollars.

The average age of students at many of the public campuses is 26 to 28 years old. Almost 25 percent of Indiana's adults take post-high school courses of some kind, a figure which is almost twice the national average.

The National Scene

The big news in higher education these days is often called "demographics." After three decades of growth, higher education now faces a decline in total aggregate demand by full-time undergraduate students. In Indiana,this means we can expect that by 1995 there will

be a 26% decline in such students. (This is about the national average.) From 1981 to 1987 we will experience a drop of almost 20,000 undergraduates, a number large enough in other days to start a new university.

But even with numerous studies about the decline in students of traditional age in higher education, there is still considerable uncertainly about the future. Some highly regarded scholars forecast a decrease of 50% in total enrollments by the year 2,000. Others, equally respected, forecast an increase of 50%. We are certain, though, that fixed costs are rising and that there will be fewer students who are young, who live on campus, who are single, who are engaged in study full-time, and who are pre-career. It is also certain from recent experience that the "new" students will require different kinds of services and desire new forms of activities.

There are, of course, consequences of all this for students, faculty, administrators, and institutions. It is our guess that the consequences for each will be quite different. For students, it will probably be -- in the words of the Carnegie Council -- a golden age. There will be more opportunities for study, at lower real prices; there will be increasing economic returns to higher education; there will be a greater variety of courses and programs from which to choose; there will be greater social mobility and increased access for women and minorities.

On the other hand, it will be a demanding time for academic

administrators. Greater attention will have to be given to staff development and rewards; to resource allocation and acquisition; and to the severe competition for students. In many ways, the imminent future provides a good chance for institutions to consolidate and improve rather than to expand educational services. However, the temptations will be great to introduce new programs and dilute quality in order to follow fads and appeal to students.

The shift of students to career and professional studies has been reported widely. But the dislocations that result have not. Over the past 10 years, the percentage of students majoring in professional studies has grown from 38% to 58%. But during this same period, the percentage of faculty in professional programs has only risen from 32% to 37%. There are two ways of looking at this. One is to say that professional programs may not have sufficient faculty resources to offer complete programs, and there is some evidence that this is true. But another observation, and the one I wish to emphasize tonight, is that this shift presents unusual challenges and opportunities for liberal arts faculty to propose programs for students who concentrate in occupational subjects.

The changes in demographics which affect college campuses and programs are parallel to changes either taking place or expected in society at large. There are changes in the age structure: the median age is higher, the percentage of people over age 65 is greater. Our minority population is increasing. There are more women. There are changes in residence patterns. The population of central cities is down, while

the population of small cities and the suburbs is increasing. We have continuing population shifts by region. There is continued employment growth in service industries, such as government, health, insurance, finance, and even education. By and large our citizens have experienced increases in income and can expect lowered rates of unemployment, which will result from the decline in the number of persons under the age of 24, the prime age range for unemployment. There will be increased numbers of educated women in the labor force, and a decrease in the number of older and less well educated men. In sum, there will be a better educated work force.

There will be more single women, more working women, more working couples, fewer dependents, and smaller household units. Competition between consuming goods and bearing children will continue, and the outcome is uncertain. Many experts predict that concern for the quality of one's life as measured by consumer goods will continue to grow.

We can expect an increase in the type of people who, in terms of age, income, and residence, recent surveys have shown to be those who attend theatre, concerts, and museums. Even conservative views about future growth in the economy suggest an increase in attendance at arts activities and productions.

Over the past ten years, Alexander Astin of UCLA has surveyed entering freshmen about a number of topics, including their desire to achieve in the performing arts. The percentage of freshmen saying "yes" has

been constant and impressive: 14% of women and 10-11% of men.

The Nature of Collegiate Theatre

It is fair to say then, I think, that collegiate theatre is an active, vital part of the higher education enterprise. In it, theatre serves several important functions.

As a humanistic resource, drama can raise questions about themes such as life and death, individual responsibility, patriotism, and spirituality; it can reveal tensions between different world views in a culture. It can even affect our definition of excellence. Drama can help reveal the blindly accepted assumptions about our world. It can, as Joseph Duffey said about the humanities, "show us that our thoughts and acts have historical precedents, philosophical implications, imaginative possibilities" (Change Magazine, February-March, 1980, p. 41).

In Chekhov's Three Sisters (1900), there is an interesting conversation on this function of theatre.

"Nina: Your play's hard to act, there are no living people in it.

Treplev: Living people! We should show life neither as it is nor as it ought to be, but as we see it in our dreams."

Theatre also provides a forum for moral, cultural, and political ideas. We all know the line in Hamlet,

"The play's the thing in which I'll catch
the conscious of the King."

But Shakespeare was not unique in this respect. "Aristophanes...wrote forceful satires on political issues. Chinese dramatists during the Yuan dynasty objectd to their Mongol conquerors through plays which emphasized themes of injustice. During the American Revolution the only dramas that appeared were the politically biased Whig and Tory satires." (Keith Michael, Research and Creative Activity, Indiana University, II:4, p.22.)

Drama is an important part of the liberal arts. It provides instruction and experience which influence oral, cognitive, and manual skill development, the use of language, self discipline, problem solving, and sensitivity to the past, the concerns of others, and to ethical and aesthetic values. It teaches, in terms expressed by Indiana University Dean Gros Louis, both technique and vision!

Theatre programs serve still other functions. They are training grounds for specialists in a wide range of skills: acting, directing, production, construction, criticism, and playwriting. In addition, drama provides both entertainment and public service. As many of you know, and others might guess, these functions are not without conflict. Two conflicts are of particular interest to me.

First, there is the conflict between a liberal arts orientation and a

conservatory approach. Some of the values of the liberal arts were cited earlier. It is my contention that the undergraduate years are the wrong time for the intensive training of future theatre professionals. Actors and others require a broad education. In fact, I would argue that it makes more sense for the future drama specialist to engage in a broadly conceived education and for the future generalist to become immersed in theatre skills, customs, and material.

Related to this dilemma are two others: between theatre performance as public service and as laboratory for students and faculty, and between liberal arts and specialist standards for accreditation of theatre programs. In the first case, one must be careful to distinguish between the teaching, research, and public service functions in offering justification for the support of theatre programs. Criteria for success differ among the three, and one must make the case for each function based on its own values, not on some others.

In the second case, which is related, leaders of liberal arts theatre programs should be wary of attempts to develop accreditation standards. No other liberal arts curricula have a similar trade association imprimatur, and dramatic arts programs do not need them either. (For an analysis of the issues of accreditation and quality, please see my "Program Review's Missing Member: A Consideration of Quality and its Measurement," The College Board Review, 1980, forthcoming.)

The second major conflict is between what Robert Brustein calls seminal and consumer theatre. Now I must admit that Brustein is one of my favorite essayists: he is informative, imaginative, and graceful -- and these are qualities I admire. So I may be prejudiced in my remarks.

Both seminal and consumer theatre incorporate features of the contemporary, the classical, and the experimental. The difference is that seminal theatre places high priority on new techniques, new playwrights, and new approaches to classical material. It sows new seeds of hope; it is directed toward its material; it has national ambitions. It is a laboratory in which theatre history is made. By contrast, consumer theatre is directed toward the public and the box office; it offers entertainment to satisfy immediate audience desires for the palatable (Robert Brustein, The Culture Watch, A.A. Knopf, 1975, pp. 153-157.)

These conflicts of purpose -- and others about the relationships of the arts and higher education -- were studied by Jack Morrison and reported in The Rise of the Arts on the American Campus (McGraw-Hill, 1974). I commend it to you for its history of the arts on campus, for its suggestions about the future, and for its conclusions about how active and vital arts endure.

Three Futures in Theatre

Given these statements about the known and expected changes in society

and on campus, and about the varied functions of drama, what can we hope and expect for collegiate theatre (in Indiana)? First, we can hope that Virginia Woolf's concept of the "common reader" will be applicable to the theatre-goer. We want a "common theatre-goer." Second, we can expect -- if the Bureau of Labor Statistics is correct -- that there will be an increase in employment opportunities for actors, dancers, announcers, editors, and reporters.

But these notions are commonplace. There are three others which I think are more important, and more bold -- though not necessarily new. They are, however, germane, possible, and (I hope) helpful to the future of collegiate theatre. They may be stated as themes: theatre and its publics; theatre and general education; and theatre and elementary education.

By "theatre and its publics" I do not mean to limit discussion to theatre as entertainment. As I hope I have made clear, I believe in the value of seminal theatre, in theatre for itself and not for the box office. The point I wish to make is that collegiate theatre must know and attempt to educate -- and serve -- its publics. And its public is not limited to the audience. Patrons and players alike are the publics of theatre.

At the undergraduate level there should be no limit to either group. However, campus theatre is often like the intercollegiate football program: capital intensive and set off on its own for the few and the select. Theatre should be more like soccer: attractive and possible

in almost any setting: stadium or meadow, varsity or intramural, with uniforms or T-shirts. I think we should teach, by our actions as well as by our lectures, that good theatre is not limited to theatre palaces. Good theatre can be performed anywhere -- on the simplest of stages, with the simplest of props. Unfortunately, too many of us equate quality with edifice and specialization. But if we limit our use of theatre to the palace, drama will not serve its instructional missions as fully as it might.

One reaction to this notion is that it offers a reason to keep collegiate theatre impoverished. But that is not my cause. Theatre programs need the funds necessary to recruit students who may need aid, to attract and retain good faculty, and to purchase instructional materials. Another reaction is that theatre needs large and modern facilities just as the sciences need their laboratories. This argument is specious. Theatre and sciences need facilities to carry out their purposes, yes; but collegiate theatre's goals of instruction and research are subverted by the pursuit of facilities which are justified primarily by the aims of consumer theatre.

By "theatre and general education," I wish to remind us of the attention given to recent efforts at reform in general education and to the prominent place theatre could have in these efforts. But these attempts have been aimed primarily at undergraduates of traditional age, and theatre has just been part of a list. Much more work is needed to develop general education programs for returning, older, and occupational students; and drama, because of its unique qualities and

its natural combination of theory and practice -- of technique and vision -- has great potential for serving the educational needs of these students. The features of dramatic arts as liberal education to emphasize are the universal and durable qualities of theatre: its use of language (it is more like poetry than narrative fiction in the discipline it requires); its cross-cultural and historical perspectives; its use of construction and costume crafts.

My last point is derived from the previous two. We hear and read often that public confidence in public schools is declining. One must ask what role higher education has in contributing to these problems and what role theatre programs might have in helping solve them.

Perhaps two groups -- teacher educators and theatre program faculty -- looking for renewed purpose in a new era, should consider how they might join forces and do more together than either can alone. Such an alliance should not be the whole of either's efforts, of course, but it could make unique educational use of university talent and young children's interest in fantasy and play-acting. The dramatic arts can be used to teach about customs and cultures, roles, values, history, the notion of self -- even arithmetic! The possibilities seem endless once we remember that good theatre can occur anywhere.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I will recite and then paraphrase a thought stated by Samuel Johnson in 1749. In saying it, I assume he realized the importance both of educating one's patrons and of service to society.

"The stage but echoes back the public voice.
The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,
For we that live to please
Must please to live."

For we that live to satisfy social needs, must satisfy those needs to live -- and to be useful.